

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Previously Presented) An isolated polynucleotide encoding the following protein
(a), (b), or (c):
 - (a) a protein consisting of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2;
 - (b) a protein consisting of an amino acid sequence at least 95% homologous to the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 and having activity of imparting salt stress tolerance to plants; or
 - (c) a protein consisting of an amino acid sequence at least 95% homologous to the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 and having UDP-glucose 4-epimerase activity.

2. (Currently Amended) An isolated polynucleotide consisting of the following DNA
(d), (e), or (f):
 - (d) DNA consisting of the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1;
 - (e) ~~DNA consisting of a nucleotide sequence at least 95% homologous to the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1 and~~ encoding a protein consisting of an amino acid sequence at least 95% homologous to the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 and having activity of imparting salt stress tolerance to plants; or
 - (f) ~~DNA consisting of a nucleotide sequence at least 95% homologous to the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1 and~~ encoding a protein consisting of an amino acid sequence at least 95% homologous to the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 and having UDP-glucose 4-epimerase activity.

3. (Previously Presented) A recombinant vector comprising the polynucleotide according to claim 1.

4. (Previously Presented) A transgenic plant into which the polynucleotide according to claim 1 has been introduced.

5. (Previously Presented) A salt stress tolerant transgenic plant into which the polynucleotide according to claim 1 has been introduced.

6. (Previously Presented) The transgenic plant according to claim 4, wherein the plant is monocotyledonous.

7. (Original) The transgenic plant according to claim 6, wherein the monocotyledonous plant belongs to the family *Gramineae*, *Liliaceae*, or *Zingiberaceae*.

8. (Original) The transgenic plant according to claim 7, wherein the plant that belongs to the family *Gramineae* is selected from the group consisting of rice, barley, wheat, maize, sugarcane, Zoysia, sorghum, Italian millet, and Japanese millet.

9. (Previously Presented) The transgenic plant according to claim 4, wherein the plant is dicotyledonous.

10. (Original) The transgenic plant according to claim 9, wherein the dicotyledonous plant belongs to the family *Brassicaceae*, *Solanaceae*, *Leguminosae*, *Cucurbitaceae*, *Umbelliferae*, *Asteraceae*, *Malvaceae*, *Chenopodiaceae*, *Myrtaceae*, or *Salicaceae*.

11. (Previously Presented) A method for imparting salt stress tolerance to plants, which comprises introducing the polynucleotide according to claim 1 into a plant, and expressing a protein encoded by the polynucleotide in the plant.

12. (Withdrawn) A selection marker for a transgenic plant comprising the gene according to claim 1.

13. (Withdrawn) The selection marker for a transgenic plant according to claim 12, wherein the plant is monocotyledonous.

14. (Withdrawn) The selection marker for a transgenic plant according to claim 13, wherein the monocotyledonous plant belongs to the family *Gramineae*, *Liliaceae*, or *Zingiberaceae*.

15. (Withdrawn) The selection marker for a transgenic plant according to claim 14, wherein the plant that belongs to the family *Gramineae* is selected from the group consisting of rice, barley, wheat, maize, sugarcane, *Zoysia*, sorghum, Italian millet, and Japanese millet.

16. (Withdrawn) The selection marker for a transgenic plant according to claim 12, wherein the plant is dicotyledonous.

17. (Withdrawn) The selection marker for a transgenic plant according to claim 16, wherein the dicotyledonous plant belongs to the family *Brassicaceae*, *Solanaceae*,

Leguminosae, Cucurbitaceae, Umbelliferae, Asteraceae, Malvaceae, Chenopodiaceae, Myrtaceae, or Salicaceae.

18. (Withdrawn) A method for selecting a transgenic plant comprising introducing the gene according to claim 1 into a plant, culturing the plant in galactose-containing medium, and selecting the transgenic plant by employing galactose tolerance as an indicator.

19. (Previously Presented) A recombinant vector comprising the polynucleotide according to claim 2.

20. (Previously Presented) A transgenic plant into which the polynucleotide according to claim 2 has been introduced.

21. (Previously Presented) A salt stress tolerant transgenic plant into which the polynucleotide according to claim 2 has been introduced.

22. (Previously Presented) The transgenic plant according to claim 20, wherein the plant is monocotyledonous.

23. (Previously Presented) The transgenic plant according to claim 22, wherein the monocotyledonous plant belongs to the family *Gramineae, Liliaceae, or Zingiberaceae.*

24. (Previously Presented) The transgenic plant according to claim 23, wherein the plant that belongs to the family *Gramineae* is selected from the group consisting of rice, barley, wheat, maize, sugarcane, *Zoysia*, sorghum, Italian millet, and Japanese millet.

25. (Previously Presented) The transgenic plant according to claim 20, wherein the plant is dicotyledonous.

26. (Previously Presented) The transgenic plant according to claim 25, wherein the dicotyledonous plant belongs to the family *Brassicaceae*, *Solanaceae*, *Leguminosae*, *Cucurbitaceae*, *Umbelliferae*, *Asteraceae*, *Malvaceae*, *Chenopodiaceae*, *Myrtaceae*, or *Salicaceae*.

27. (Previously Presented) A method for imparting salt stress tolerance to plants, which comprises introducing the polynucleotide according to claim 2 into a plant, and expressing a protein encoded by the polynucleotide in the plant.

28. (Withdrawn) A selection marker for a transgenic plant comprising the gene according to claim 2.

29. (Withdrawn) The selection marker for a transgenic plant according to claim 28, wherein the plant is monocotyledonous.

30. (Withdrawn) The selection marker for a transgenic plant according to claim 29, wherein the monocotyledonous plant belongs to the family *Gramineae*, *Liliaceae*, or *Zingiberaceae*.

31. (Withdrawn) The selection marker for a transgenic plant according to claim 30, wherein the plant that belongs to the family *Gramineae* is selected from the group consisting of rice, barley, wheat, maize, sugarcane, Zoysia, sorghum, Italian millet, and Japanese millet.

32. (Withdrawn) The selection marker for a transgenic plant according to claim 28, wherein the plant is dicotyledonous.

33. (Withdrawn) The selection marker for a transgenic plant according to claim 32, wherein the dicotyledonous plant belongs to the family *Brassicaceae*, *Solanaceae*, *Leguminosae*, *Cucurbitaceae*, *Umbelliferae*, *Asteraceae*, *Malvaceae*, *Chenopodiaceae*, *Myrtaceae*, or *Salicaceae*.

34. (Withdrawn) A method for selecting a transgenic plant comprising introducing the gene according to claim 2 into a plant, culturing the plant in galactose-containing medium, and selecting the transgenic plant by employing galactose tolerance as an indicator.

35. (Withdrawn) A transgenic plant into which the recombinant vector according to claim 3 has been introduced.

36. (Withdrawn) A salt stress tolerant transgenic plant into which the recombinant vector according to claim 3 has been introduced.

37. (Withdrawn) The transgenic plant according to claim 35, wherein the plant is monocotyledonous.

38. (Withdrawn) The transgenic plant according to claim 37, wherein the monocotyledonous plant belongs to the family *Gramineae*, *Liliaceae*, or *Zingiberaceae*.

39. (Withdrawn) The transgenic plant according to claim 38, wherein the plant that belongs to the family *Gramineae* is selected from the group consisting of rice, barley, wheat, maize, sugarcane, *Zoysia*, sorghum, Italian millet, and Japanese millet.

40. (Withdrawn) The transgenic plant according to 35, wherein the plant is dicotyledonous.

41. (Withdrawn) The transgenic plant according to claim 40, wherein the dicotyledonous plant belongs to the family *Brassicaceae*, *Solanaceae*, *Leguminosae*, *Cucurbitaceae*, *Umbelliferae*, *Asteraceae*, *Malvaceae*, *Chenopodiaceae*, *Myrtaceae*, or *Salicaceae*.

42. (Previously Presented) A method for imparting salt stress tolerance to plants, which comprises introducing the polynucleotide according to claim 3 into a plant, and expressing a protein encoded by the polynucleotide in the plant.

43. (Withdrawn) A method for selecting a transgenic plant comprising introducing the recombinant vector according to claim 3 into a plant, culturing the plant in galactose-containing medium, and selecting the transgenic plant by employing galactose tolerance as an indicator.

44. (Currently Amended) The polynucleotide according to claim 1, wherein said polynucleotide encodes ~~(a)~~ a protein consisting of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2.

45. (Currently Amended) The polynucleotide according to claim 1, wherein said polynucleotide encodes ~~(b)~~ a protein consisting of an amino acid sequence at least 95% homologous to the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 and having activity of imparting salt stress tolerance to plants.

46. (Currently Amended) The polynucleotide according to claim 1, wherein said polynucleotide encodes ~~(c)~~ a protein consisting of an amino acid sequence at least 95% homologous to the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 and having UDP-glucose 4-epimerase activity.

47. (Currently Amended) The polynucleotide according to claim 2, wherein said polynucleotide consists of ~~(d)~~ DNA consisting of the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1.

48. (Currently Amended) The polynucleotide according to claim 2, wherein said polynucleotide consists of ~~(e)~~ DNA ~~consisting of a nucleotide sequence at least 95%~~

~~homologous to the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1~~ and encoding a protein consisting of an amino acid sequence at least 95% homologous to the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 and having activity of imparting salt stress tolerance to plants.

49. (Currently Amended) The polynucleotide according to claim 2, wherein said polynucleotide consists of (f) DNA ~~consisting of a nucleotide sequence at least 95% homologous to the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1~~ and encoding a protein consisting of an amino acid sequence at least 95% homologous to the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 and having UDP-glucose 4-epimerase activity.